

The changing face of doing business in Auckland

What is the reality?

Employers have been reporting an increasing skills shortage over the past three years, with more than a third of businesses consistently indicating that it is harder to find the skills needed.

Penny Smith, employment division manager of the Auckland Chamber of Commerce says there are things employers can do.

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Today the Auckland region is the most populated and ethnically and culturally diverse. According to the Auckland Overview of Labour Force Trends 2014 published by Immigration New Zealand, 39% of Aucklanders were born overseas and nearly 30% of the population speak more than one language. According to the 2013 Census, more than half of the working age population in Auckland (58.9%) was not

born in New Zealand. Current unemployment figures are low, down to 6.3% from 6.7% in the past three months and job openings in Auckland are up 8% on an annual basis.

'But there is still a mismatch between the skills/experience of those that are job seeking and the skills/experience employers are looking for right now,' explains Penny.

Based upon the latest Census, the top employment sectors in Auckland are professional services, scientific and technical services, manufacturing and retail trade. Some key sectors continue to experience a skills shortage including ICT, food and beverage and construction.

The solution? Train more people in areas where we need more skills and attract and retain more migrants who already have experience and a wide range of skills.

This changes the face of doing business in Auckland and has an impact on many businesses who need to ask what is practical, how does this affect business management decisions and what are the recruitment implications? What can employers do to find and retain the right skills? How can employers adopt the right approach and access the right support to manage the adjustments needed to help newcomers and returning Kiwis settle in and stay in employment?

There are solutions for both migrants and employers.

To help recently arrived migrants learn about New Zealand workplace and cultural norms, the Auckland Chamber, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development offers

a three day initiative for newcomers called 'New Kiwi Career Success'.

'Participants are 'on fire,' says Penny, 'we help them understand NZ workplace norms, the power of networking, how to rework their CVs and how to prepare for interviews NZ style. We also help them understand how to present their overseas experience as relevant to NZ employers. These are great people with great skills and over 80% are securing good roles within the first four months.'

'For employers we also have the www.newkiwis.co.nz website and wider nationwide service funded through Immigration New Zealand,' adds Penny. 'Migrants register their interest in working and employers can confidently search this candidate pool and access our wider support services – without advertising. All job seekers have registered within the last 6 months so this is a rich pool of actively job seeking candidates both onshore and from overseas. An increasing number of businesses are actually finding they gain valuable and extra skills through those who bring overseas experience with them.'

Patrick Teo, chief executive of technology hardware solutions company BCS Limited, a company that has worked with the Auckland Chamber says, 'We have people from more than 40 different countries through a combination of coincidence and deliberate employment strategy but primarily because we keep a pretty open mind about people's ethnic background. After all, it's all about the best people for the various roles that we have.'

Language and adjusting to New Zealand life is probably the biggest challenge. Language barriers are removed with time as long as there is a willingness for both parties to be ➤

» patient, for the newcomer to have the will to learn and very importantly, for all parties to have the will to try to understand each other,' he adds.

How can we maintain and grow Auckland's contribution of 35% of the country's economic output if we cannot increase productivity?

'New Zealand's economy-wide labour productivity growth has been lower than most other OECD countries. However the connection between helping employees settle and productivity is the same whether the employee is a migrant or not. The challenge is to take advantage of the wide range of different cultures and know how to deal with this,' says Penny.

How do we think differently about the productivity of new Kiwi staff?

Penny adds that while many migrant employees come to New Zealand with valuable skills they do need support to settle. 'Many of the issues faced are the same as someone moving from Christchurch to Auckland but with a whole extra layer added in. Employers need to look at what will help new employees. While this means managing a multicultural workplace better to increase productivity, the steps are straight forward and not costly, it just takes a little understanding and believe me, a little goes a long way.'

Practical ways to support new Kiwis include -

- Let your existing team know who is coming and a bit about their cultural background
- Be there to meet the new employee and welcome them, in some cultures status is important, being the manager and being there, will be an important first impression

- Ensure that there is an structured induction process
- Introduce a buddy or mentor – their 'go to person' – and ensure the buddy is fully committed to the role they will play in settling in
- Make sure the job description and/or job tasks are well-documented and understood
- Explain workplace etiquette, how things are done around here
- Find out about the new employee's cultural values and work style, the more you understand about how they are used to doing things, the easier it will be to introduce your norms
- Host social events – let everyone see we generally have the same values even though we might do things differently – it could be something as simple as a shared lunch
- Set up specific training or extra training in communications and the workplace
- Encourage a culture of learning and the ability to ask questions, anticipate and deal quickly with any negative assumptions around particular cultures through lack of understanding
- Provide family support – wherever possible. This can make all the difference and can be as simple as giving advice on schools, transport or healthcare services

The New Kiwi's nationwide Employer Survey conducted by the Auckland Chamber in partnership with Immigration New Zealand in March 2014 revealed that whilst employers recognise the changing face of the New Zealand workplace, the proportion of employers that have nothing in place to help settle migrant employees more than doubled to 30.3% in 2014 from 12.5% in 2013. This trend looks likely to be similar in this year's survey results.

Penny points out, 'This trending needs to change and the benefits to the business are clear. Managers are naturally acquiring greater experience managing a diverse workforce, but there's a lot of help out there for employers to realize the potential of their workforce earlier. The Chamber and Immigration New Zealand have developed a number of comprehensive resources to help employers and newcomers in this space and local migrant networks are also accessible and able to provide 'informal' settlement support to new migrant employees. Being prepared for new migrant employees improves the chances of a successful recruitment outcome and of keeping your new employee.'

Of those surveyed who have something in place for migrant employees, 34.6% host staff social events to help them transition into the workplace. 28.4% of respondents arranged for a mentor or used a buddy system, 15.8% provide a structured training programme (internal or external) and 11.5% also provided wider support to the partner and family.

'Employers can prepare for the arrival of newcomers to ensure they settle more quickly. The ongoing benefits include lower staff turnover and greater productivity,' explains Penny. ■

CHAMBER SUPPORT

For more information about any of the Chamber initiatives and resources or if you are looking to fill a current vacancy, please contact the Auckland Chamber employment team on 0800 709 907 to discuss the no-cost recruitment process. To view current candidates ready and available to start work today visit the newkiwis.co.nz website and www.aucklandchamber.co.nz. Look for 'Find Staff' in the section 'Business Support.'

There are also external resources and support networks available to help both employers and new migrant employees.

WorkTalk is an online tool provided by Immigration New Zealand developed in collaboration with Victoria University of Wellington. It is designed to help improve communication between New Zealand employers or managers and new migrant employees from other cultures. www.worktalk.immigration.govt.nz

Immigration New Zealand's website provides an 'Employer Hub' with general

information and resources aimed at assisting Employers attract, recruit and retain migrants with the skills they are looking for. www.immigration.govt.nz/employers

Recruiting from offshore? Connect your new employee to this very useful tool that will help them plan their whole migration, including things they may not have even thought of: Getting New Zealand ready. www.nzready.immigration.govt.nz